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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; US PRESIDENT BUSH'S LATAM TOUR;
US-VENEZUELAN TIES; 03/15/07; BUENOS AIRES

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Key international stories today focus on the "meager" achievements of US President Bush's trip to Latin American countries; and an interpretation of Argentina's ties to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and his regime.

2. OPINION PIECES

- "The US Senate already debates a plan of withdrawal from Iraq"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nacion," comments (03/15) "Far from having recovered international image, US President Bush returned last night to this capital city without having achieved major results out of his longest trip to Latin America and, on top of everything, many new problems were awaiting him at the White House.

"On the one hand, the Democratic opposition got the Senate to debate for the first time an eventual gradual troop pullout from Iraq, which should be completed in one year. Two scandals added themselves to this - the one about the mistreatment received by veterans injured in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the blooming scandal over the alleged dismissal of eight federal prosecutors for political reasons.

"... Bush has just returned from a trip to Latin America without having obtained conclusive progress. His team for the region, which is led by (Assistant Secretary) Tom Shannon, was 'satisfied' with his tour, but they also received some objections. Complications were patent during the last press conference of President Bush's tour. With his Mexican counterpart, Felipe Calderon, standing next to him, Bush had to answer whether he would ask for Gonzalez' resignation as a result of questions regarding his firing of prosecutors."

- "Chavez and Argentina"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" carries an opinion piece by Juan Gabriel Tokatlían, professor of International Relationships at Universidad de San Andrés, who penned (03/15) "... I believe Argentina's empathy with Venezuela is more the outcome of some feeling than acceptance of the regime adopted by (Venezuela). This empathy could be prompted by Argentina's own Peronist experience - there are many similarities between the Peronist and the Chavist revolutions...

"... In the aftermath of Argentina's 2001-2002 economic meltdown, there still prevailed a feeling in a large segment of Argentine society that Washington let the country fall into its most severe crisis... During the Duhalde administration, Washington neither helped the country nor urged the IMF to rescue it... When President Kirchner took over, in the framework of high hydrocarbon

international prices, Caracas lent a hand to Argentina by providing energy, purchasing bonds, importing goods and contributing funds to the country's recovery.

"... Nevertheless, empathy does not mean emulation. Neither the (Argentine) Executive Branch nor the main political forces want to transform the institutional model in force into a confusing participative democracy like that set forth by the Venezuelan Constitution. In spite of Argentina's empathy with Chavez, I believe there is little sympathy for the Bolivarian Revolution."

13. EDITORIALS

- "Bush and a tour with little impact"

An editorial in leading "Clarín" reads (03/15) "The US President finally ended his five-Latin American nation-tour, the first one he made after a long time in which ties with this part of the hemisphere were relegated by other priorities of the US foreign policy.

"US President Bush's tour included Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico - countries which the USG considers strategic allies or governments that Washington prefers to prioritize vis-à-vis others that are more distant or openly critical, such as Venezuela and Bolivia.

"... If the USG intended to neutralize Chavez's clout in the region, it can be asserted that the outcome of the tour has been meager.

"Regardless of the confrontational strategies and the attempts to win regional influence, it is important to underscore that Latin American countries have regained some interest in the (US) hemispheric agenda both because of the problems and opportunities they present, something of which local foreign policy-makers should take advantage."

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